

STATEMENT BEFORE THE REPUBLICAN PLATFORM COMMITTEE

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I am Clarence Walton, President of The Catholic University of America in Washington. My appearance before the Republican Platform Committee, however, relates not to problems of higher education but to those confronting elementary and secondary schools--especially as they affect nonpublic school students.

This interest stems from my experiences as Chairman of the President's Panel on Nonpublic Education¹ (two members of which join me today before your distinguished group), and as a member of the President's Commission on School Finance. What follows represents my personal views of the situation.

The role of the Federal Government vis à vis nonpublic school students is extraordinarily complex because of a volatile mix of ideological, economic, social, and constitutional issues. But the very volatility of the mix creates its own pressures for courageous and far-seeing action by the Republican Party--action based on reasoned judgment and sincere commitment to the public interest.

Before outlining a few suggestions let me note, parenthetically, that the Republican Party has already demonstrated sensitive and courageous concern. In the Party's Platform of 1968, in campaign statements of Richard Nixon during that same period, in the rhetoric and actions of Mr. Nixon since coming to the Presidency, are found eloquent testimonies to the interest of this Administration in the over-arching and interdependent problems of both public and nonpublic education.

I share this philosophy which is premised on the judgment that education--in all of its manifestations and with all its institutional diversities--is a seamless web. It follows, therefore, that while addressing myself to the nonpublic school student I am neither unmindful of, nor indifferent to, the needs of the public school youngster. Now to specifics.

Ideology

In terms of ideological postures, the American people have exhibited different attitudes toward the role and place of the nonpublic school student in education. Some favor institutional diversity and pluralism. Others believe that all students should be enrolled in public schools because, to them, such institutions are deemed uniquely equipped to "Americanize" or "democratize" all youngsters. Others fear that interest in nonpublic school children might divert urgently needed funds from public schools.

I do not believe these concerns form the appropriate basis for determining public policy toward education during the 1970's. I respectfully suggest that the logical premise is one which asserts the right of every child to a quality education in an institutional setting which is deemed most effective by parents--so long as such schools conform to professional standards and the norms of racial justice. In short, eyes should be eternally fixed on the child's needs and the parents' responsibilities--not on the claims of interested groups.

Economics

Action and inaction both result in costs to the public treasury. Forgotten is the fact that a "do-nothing" attitude is often more costly in the long run than modest interventions at a critical point. Nonpublic education is at a critical point. Further, there must be a realistic reckoning that (with inflation and with competition for public funds from different legitimate sources in health, welfare, safety, environment, and the like) the Federal Government can not be all things to all men. When public interest requires it to act, it must do so with determination to promote the public good most

¹The Panel's Report, Nonpublic Education and the Public Good was presented to President

efficiently and with wisest expenditures of public funds. To prevent the collapse of private voluntary efforts is more efficient than assuming added costs occasioned by student transfer to public facilities which could reach five billion dollars annually in operating costs alone. The problem is especially sensitive for our twenty largest cities where two out of every five children are enrolled in nonpublic institutions.

This "over-load" factor in precariously poised urban centers must not be understated. Taxpayers are demonstrating growing disinclinations to ratify and support additional revenue for schools. In 1964 approximately three of every four bond issues received public support whereas in 1971 less than half were ratified.

The public needs are already great. The National Education Finance Project reported a deficit of 500,000 classrooms in 1968 which represented a backlog of needed construction that had accumulated during the depression and World War II.

"Especially in urban districts, antiquated and the educationally obsolete classrooms which normally would have been replaced have remained in use....In the decade of the 1970's, the nation will need approximately 120,000 classrooms per year at an estimated annual aggregate cost of \$7.8 billion in 1968-69 dollars...."²

Legal

Constitutional questions are being answered by courts in different ways. It is my judgment that a legitimate way to meet Constitutional requirements is through tax credits which avoid excessive entanglement by government.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

I respectfully suggest the following:

- (1) The Republican Party commits itself to a full and effective working partnership with the states to the end that all children are given quality education.
- (2) The Republican Party guarantees to all children equal participation in federally supported educational programs.
- (3) The Republican Party endorses federal tax credits for tuitions paid to nonpublic schools and it looks favorably on formulas which can be automatically adjusted to meet added costs induced by inflation, which will not exceed half the average national cost of educating a child in public schools, and which have cut-off points for those in upper-income brackets.
- (4) The Republican Party believes the Federal Government's responsibility is to the child's need, not the child's creed.

²Future Directions for School Financing, pp. 29-31

³The President's Commission on School Finance, pp. 11-12